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## 2026 1<sup>st</sup> Sub S.B. 118: Mental Health Services in Higher Education

2026 General Session 1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118, Mental Health Services in Higher Education, creates the Peer-to-Peer Coaching and Mental Health Counseling Grant for institutions of higher education.

### Key Points

- Creates the Peer-to-Peer Coaching and Mental Health Counseling Grant to support student mental health at higher education institutions
- Tasks the Utah Board of Higher Education with administering the grant
- Requires institutions to either establish a peer coaching program with trained student volunteers or use funds for other mental health services
- Appropriates \$1.5 million from the Income Tax Fund as a revenue-neutral reallocation for FY 2027

## Policy Analysis

1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118 would establish the Peer-to-Peer Coaching and Mental Health Counseling Grant for institutions of higher education. The purpose of the grant is to provide funds for institutions of higher education to improve mental health support for students.

The grant would provide funding to institutions of higher education to promote positive mental health and provide trained peer coaching to students. Additionally, funds from the grant would be used to support wellness resources to help students manage personal, academic, and emotional challenges.

Under the grant program, the Utah Board of Higher Education would oversee implementation of the grant and distribute \$1.5 million in funds to institutions of higher education that choose to participate. Institutions of higher education would have flexibility to either establish the peer coaching program or use the funds for other mental health services for students.

## Responsibilities & Additional Policies

### Responsibilities of the Utah Board of Higher Education

1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118 would task the Utah Board of Higher Education with:

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- Administering and overseeing the grant
- Creating standards for the grant regarding outcomes, goals, and reporting requirements for institutions receiving the grant
- Distributing grant funds to institutions, subject to legislative appropriations
- Making rules in accordance with the Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act to implement the grant requirements

## **Responsibilities of the Institutions of Higher Education**

1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118 would task institutions of higher education that receive grant funds from the Board with establishing and implementing a peer coaching program or using the funds to provide other mental health services to students enrolled at the institution.

Institutions that receive grant funds to implement the peer coaching program must:

- Create and provide training to students who volunteer to become peer coaches
- Ensure students complete training before providing support as peer coaches
- Establish requirements and processes for peer coaches to identify and refer students in need of professional help to licensed mental health professionals

## **Responsibilities and Limitations of a Peer Coach**

1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118 would allow peer coaches to provide support to other students through:

- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Counseling
- Assisting with personal, academic, or emotional challenges
- Accessing campus resources
- Advising students to seek professional care when appropriate

S.B. 118 defines "peer coach" to mean a trained student who volunteers to provide non-clinical, peer-to-peer-mental health support to another student. Peer coaches **are not** licensed mental health professionals.

The bill would prohibit peer coaches from diagnosing or providing clinical therapy to a student.

## **Liability Protections**

1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118 clarifies that the provisions of the bill would not:

- Create a cause of action against a peer coach for acts or failures to act
- Waive governmental immunity in accordance with Utah Code Section 63G-7-201
- Create or expand liability for institutions of higher education
- Create an employment relationship between peer coaches and institutions of higher education

## **Funding**

1<sup>st</sup> Substitute S.B. 118 appropriates \$1.5 million from the Income Tax Fund for FY 2027 as a revenue-neutral reallocation. The funds are distributed through the Utah Board of Higher Education's Student Support programs for Peer-to-Peer Counseling.